

Climate change beliefs and savings behavior: a macroeconomic perspective

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Motivation: anticipation of climate change impacts

Climate change is a major challenge of our time.

- Estimated GDP loss of 1°C of warming: 1.2% Burke et al. (2015), 12% Bilal (2024)
- People's Climate Vote 2024: 76% globally worry about effects on next generations (87% in UK)

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- Savings as self-insurance?

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What are the macroeconomic implications of climate change beliefs?

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What are the macroeconomic implications of climate change beliefs?

- Do beliefs over climate change affect individual savings?
- Does the effect on capital accumulation lead to with macroeconomic consequences?
- Does disagreement over climate impacts matter for aggregate or distributional outcomes?

Micro behavior: Do climate beliefs affect individual savings?

Macro effects: Do climate beliefs matter for aggregate and distributional outcomes?

Micro behavior: Do climate beliefs affect individual savings?

- Partial equilibrium consumption-savings model
 - Analytical expression for savings response to change in climate change beliefs
- Empirical evidence from UK
 - Observational: representative UK panel survey
 - Causal: specific purpose online questionnaire

Macro effects: Do climate beliefs matter for aggregate and distributional outcomes?

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Macro effects: Do climate beliefs matter for aggregate and distributional outcomes?

- **Non-stationary** general equilibrium model with incomplete markets and aggregate risk
 - Climate change as shift in stochastic productivity process
 - Uncertainty over trend in productivity
 - Heterogeneity in income, wealth and beliefs

Key take-aways: The effects of climate change beliefs

Micro behavior: Climate beliefs affect both individual savings...

Macro effects: ...and macroeconomic outcomes along the transition to more frequent exposure.

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Micro behavior: Climate beliefs affect both individual savings...

- Theory
 - Higher concern over productivity impacts increases savings
 - Non-monotone dependence on idiosyncratic state
- Empirical evidence
 - Significant positive relationship between climate change beliefs and savings choices:
Likelihood to save +9pp, savings share +1pp
 - Not fully attributable to preferences or exposure

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Macro effects: ...and macroeconomic outcomes along the transition to more frequent exposure.

- **Climate concern effect:** capital \uparrow , output loss from climate change \downarrow
NPV of output: +12% under accurate initial beliefs
- Benefits the poor disproportionately: wealth inequality \downarrow temporarily
- Small but persistent negative impacts of disagreement

Climate change impacts on the macroeconomy

- Stochastic damages: Golosov et al. (2014), Cai and Lontzek (2019)
- Anticipation: Bilal and Rossi-Hansberg (2023), Bakkensen and Barrage (2022)

Contribution: Amplified consequences of uncertainty in decentralized framework

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Contribution: Implications along the transition path

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Contribution: Implications along the transition path

Incomplete markets and aggregate risks: theory and computation

- Krusell and Smith (1998), Farhi et al. (2022), Broer et al. (2022), Fernández-Villaverde et al. (2023), Bilal (2023), Auclert et al. (2021), Moll (2024),

Contribution: Non-stationarity in aggregate process, global solution method

Predictions in partial equilibrium

Choose consumption to maximize **expected** life-time utility, subject to budget constraint.

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Two types of uncertainty affect income:

- Aggregate state: productivity
 - Pins down average wages and asset returns
 - Possibly **dependent** on climate change
- Idiosyncratic state: demographics, asset holdings
 - Affects personal labor income
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How do savings depend on beliefs over climate change?

- How do consumption choices respond to changes in **perceived probabilities** of aggregate states?
- First order response to changes in beliefs from Euler equation (cf. Farhi et al., 2022)

First order consumption response

Perturbation in $p_1 = \mathbb{P}(\text{low productivity in } t = 1)$ affects consumption choice in period 0:

$$\frac{dc_0}{c_0} = -\varepsilon(c_0) \cdot MPS_0 \cdot \mathcal{D}_0 dp_1$$

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→ Small if **borrowing constrained**
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Responses to perturbations in future probabilities dp_t , $t > 1$

- History-dependence and risk-adjusted measure over idiosyncratic states

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Take-aways:

1. Concern over adverse macro risks increases individual savings
2. Opposing forces of current idiosyncratic state

Empirical evidence

Model predictions:

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Two types of UK survey evidence:

1. Observational: large, representative UK panel survey
2. Causal: specific purpose online questionnaire

UK Longitudinal Household Survey, waves 4 and 10 (2012-13, 2018-19)

- Construct index about climate change concern
- Savings variables (binary and amount)
- Demographic indicators
 - education, income, residence (LSOA), age, children

Exposure

- Flood data matched on residence

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Exposure

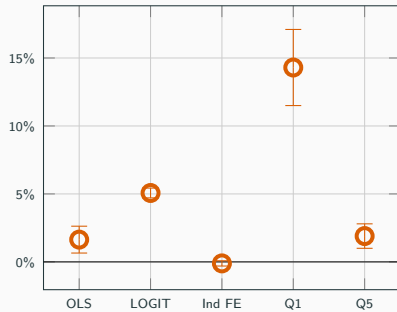
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Addresses two main concerns:

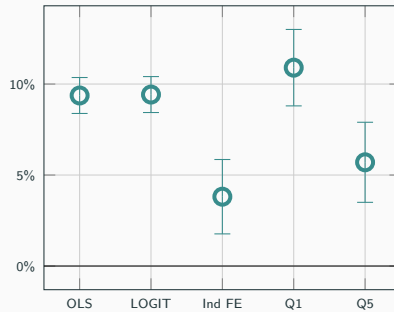
1. Preferences over risk and time → Individual fixed effects
2. Idiosyncratic exposure → Flood exposure, area fixed effects

Empirical results

Intensive margin
Increase in savings share



Extensive margin
Increase in Likelihood to save



Goal: obtain causal evidence by using within-subject design (cf. Andre et al., 2025)

Hypothetical savings choice: How much would you save out of a 5000 GBP transfer?

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- on overall concern, beliefs over specific mechanisms, personal savings behavior

Key statistic: relative effect of scenario on marginal savings $\Delta s = \frac{\text{Saved}(A) - \text{Saved}(B)}{\text{Saved}(B)}$

Specific purpose online survey

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Full sample	
Δs	7.6%***
Observations	543

Income		
low	medium	high
10.0%***	7.2%**	5.3%
178	230	81

Survey design

Sample

Questionnaire

Key take-aways:

- Passthrough of adverse aggregate risks: savings \uparrow , depending on idiosyncratic state
- Empirical evidence for relationship between climate concern and savings choices

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Open question: Do climate change beliefs matter for the macroeconomy?

- How does additional capital accumulation affect output losses during climate transition?
- Does the observed disagreement over climate change matter for macroeconomic outcomes?

→ Dynamic general equilibrium model

General Equilibrium Model

General Equilibrium model

Households

- are subject to idiosyncratic shocks: income and life-cycle;
- consume and save to maximize EU, given budget constraint and borrowing limit.

Representative firm

- produces using capital and labor;
- pays wages and interest;
- is subject to productivity shocks $\zeta_t \in \{\zeta^L, \zeta^H\}$, $\zeta^L < \zeta^H$.

Market clearing

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Climate change

- causes non-stationary, exogenous shift in global temperature:

$$T_{t+1} = \nu T_t + (1 - \nu)\mu_T \quad \text{for } t \geq 0;$$

- which may affect the frequency of low productivity states and is known at time $t = 0$.

Probability of adverse aggregate shock is given by $\mathbb{P}(\zeta_t = \zeta^L) = p^{1-\gamma T_t}$ with **unknown** parameter γ

- Two possible states of the world: $\gamma \in \{0, \bar{\gamma}\}$
- Individual initial belief $\pi_{it} = \mathbb{P}_0(\gamma = \bar{\gamma})$
- Bayesian updating

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Impacts modeled via **measure**, not sample space of aggregate process

- All realizations possible under all beliefs
- Implicit level effect

Baseline: $\gamma = \bar{\gamma}$ is the true model.

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Assumption: bounded rationality

Decisions are based on Perceived Law of Motion (PLM)

$$K' = \mathcal{H}(K; \mathcal{X}) \quad \text{for some explanatory variables } \mathcal{X}.$$

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How to choose PLM?

1. Find self-justified equilibrium to approximate rational expectations (Krusell and Smith, 1998)
 - Estimate \mathcal{H} on simulated data, iterate until convergence
 - In stationary setting: log-linear \mathcal{H} , $\mathcal{X} = \zeta$ performs well

→ extend idea to non-stationary framework
2. Alternative to address Moll (2024) critique: adaptive expectations, with and without learning

Fix some functional form

- Obvious candidates for \mathcal{X} : shock ζ , temperature T , personal belief π
- Guess for \mathcal{H}
 - linear in $\pi \rightarrow$ only estimate for $\pi \in \{0, 1\}$
 - log-linear in K with coefficients depending on ζ and T

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Generate simulated data

- Non-stationarity: **ensemble** of shock sequences
 - Stratified sample: Match theoretical averages within each period
 - Preserves intratemporal, but decreases intertemporal variance in key summary statistics

Iterate on parameters until convergence. Validate with alternative initial distribution.

Model selection

Stratification procedure

Alternative algorithm: adaptive expectations with learning

For period t : Ψ_t **distribution of agents** over demographics, asset holdings and beliefs.

Dynamic equilibrium

For a given (a) aggregate draw, (b) initial distribution Ψ_0 and (c) PLM \mathcal{H} , the *dynamic equilibrium* of the economy is given by a sequence of distributions $\{\Psi_t\}_{t \geq 0}$ so that:

1. Each period, households and firms optimize given their beliefs; markets clear.
2. Ψ_t evolves according to (i) law of motion for demographics, (ii) savings choices, and (iii) Bayes' formula.

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Summary statistics

- Stochastic Steady State
- Ensemble averages

Earnings and life-cycle:

- AR(1) process for skills estimated on UK panel data
- Expected duration working life (retirement): 40 (20) years; replacement rate 60%

Aggregate shocks: Effect of climate change on UK productivity

- AR(1) process for temperature, long-run increase of 0.9 deg within 75 years.
- Meta study Rising et al. (2022) estimates output losses:

1.1% in 2022, 3.3% by 2050, 7.4% by 2100

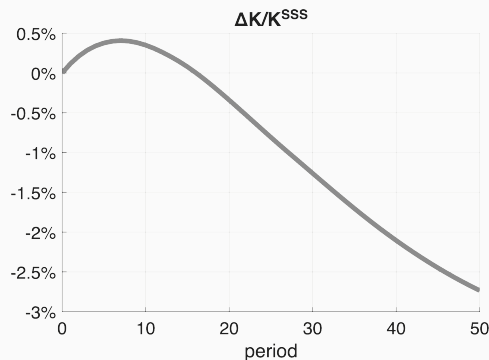
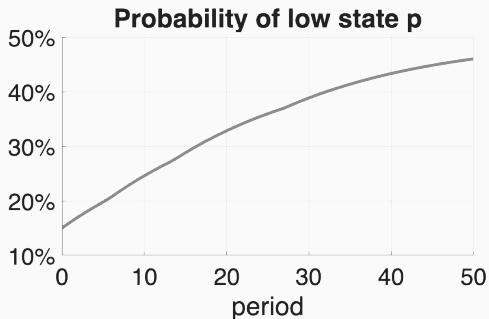
- Bad states $p_0 = 0.15$, $\zeta^L = 0.93$:

$$\mathbb{E}(\zeta_0) = 0.9895, \mathbb{E}(\zeta_{100}) = 0.965$$

Model results

The climate transition under accurate beliefs

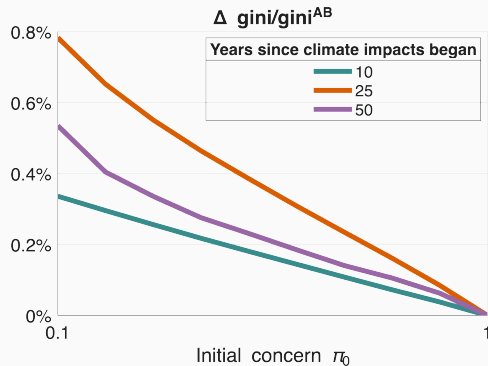
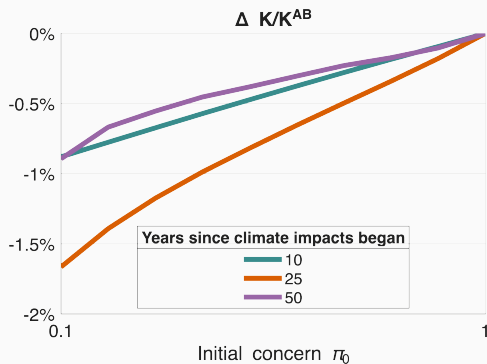
At time $t = 0$, everyone becomes aware of the shift in temperature and knows $\gamma = \bar{\gamma}$



Increased savings in short run \rightarrow smoothed transition

Capital accumulation under homogeneous beliefs

Inaccurate prior: capital \downarrow , inequality \uparrow

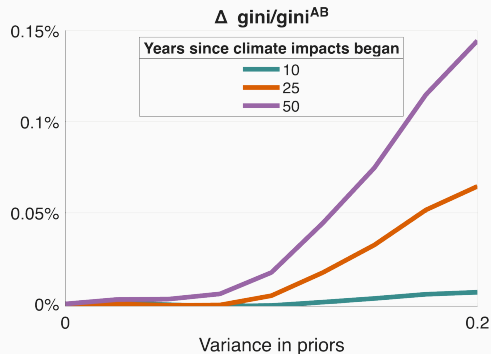
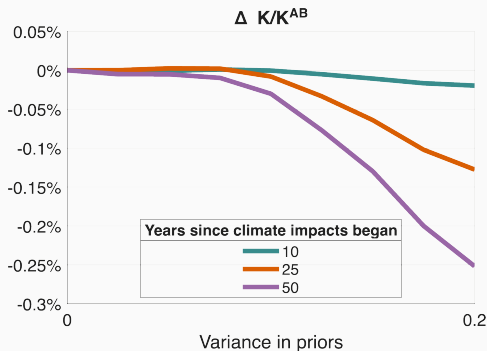


As long as prior $\pi > 0$: learning and long-run convergence.

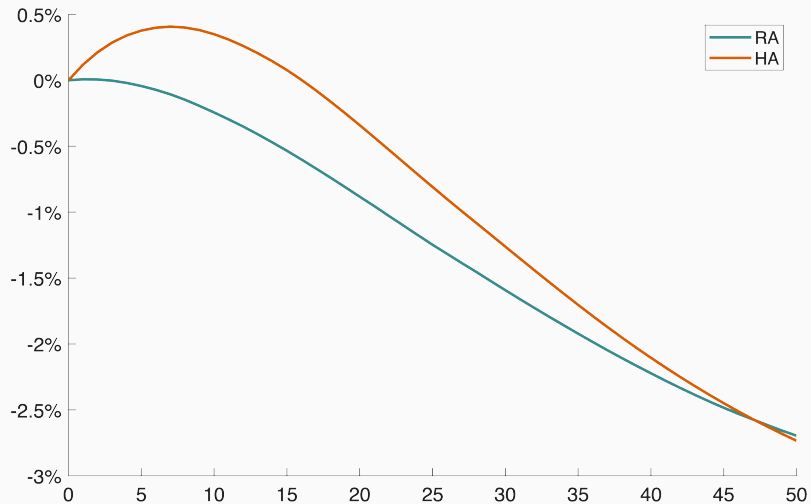
For $\pi = 0$: long run divergence

Capital accumulation under dispersed beliefs

Small effect of disagreement, but persistent.



Mechanisms: The role of incomplete markets



Conclusion: Beliefs over climate change matter for the macroeconomy.

Micro behavior

- Climate concern affects individual savings decisions
- Consistent with a model of aggregate climate damages
- Cross-sectional heterogeneity rationalized by borrowing constraint

Macro effects

- Climate concern effect: capital increases in short-run, attenuates climate damages
- Heterogeneous impacts: high capital disproportionately benefits poor
- Disagreement plays small but persistent role

Beliefs over aggregate risks in incomplete markets

- Development and solution of non-stationary model
- Applicable to range of questions on uncertainty and disagreement over structural shifts

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Descriptive Statistics: Index

